

California Regional Water Quality Control Board  
Santa Ana Region

October 25, 2002

ITEM: 30

SUBJECT: Executive Officer's Report

DISCUSSION:

**1. Criminal Charges Filed in Ultra Wheel Case, Orange County** – Regional Board staff have been involved with the Orange County Sanitation District and the Orange County District Attorney's office in a long-term, joint investigation of the Ultra Wheel Corporation, a chrome wheel plating manufacturer, located in Buena Park. On September 30, 2002, the Orange County District Attorney's Office filed criminal charges against the corporation's owner and three managers. The owner and managers were charged with 17 felony counts of hazardous waste dumping in a case prosecutors call the most egregious of its kind in nearly 20 years. Included in those 17 counts were five counts for discharging heavy metals (copper and nickel), acids, machine coolants and other hydrocarbons directly into Coyote Creek over a two year period. These five counts were filed as a direct result of Board staff's surveillance and investigation activities. The defendants face a maximum penalty of 11 years in state prison and more than \$1,000,000 in fines, if convicted on all counts.

**2. Assembly Select Committee on Underground Water Quality** - On October 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Assembly Select Committee on Underground Water Quality (Committee) held a hearing in our Region at the offices of the Cucamonga County Water District. The Committee was chaired by Assemblymember Carol Liu, who represents the communities in the San Gabriel Valley. Also in attendance were Assemblymember Howard Wayne from San Diego and Assemblymember Gloria Negrete McLeod who represents the Montclair area. The hearing was entitled, "Groundwater 101: Issues Affecting California's Groundwater Quality and Availability". Speakers included Barbara Evoy from the State Water Resources Control Board; Carl Hauge, Chief Hydrogeologist with the State Department of Water Resources; Tim Parker with the Groundwater Resources Association of California; and John Rossi, the Chino Basin Director of Watermaster Services.

This hearing was quite well attended by Chino Basin and Santa Ana River watershed parties interested in both water quality and water supply. The presentations were oriented to the bigger picture of water quality and water quantity for the state. One of the major focal points was the need for statewide monitoring of groundwater quality. This issue has been raised in the past, but there were always a number of special interest concerns that managed to keep these programs from being implemented. The current drought conditions might be generating a renewed interest in statewide monitoring of groundwater quality. This would include electronic data management.

John Rossi, the Director of Watermaster Services for the Chino Basin, described the Chino Basin Optimum Basin Management Plan and the cooperative efforts underway to productively manage the basin for the future, including the roles that conjunctive use and recycled water

recharge will play. John also made a number of kind comments concerning the efforts of the regional board to work cooperatively in support of the Optimum Basin Management Plan and local management initiatives.

**3. Budget Cuts and Staff Reductions** – The state budget, as recently adopted by the legislature and signed by the Governor, requires significant budget cuts for the State and regional boards. Our hiring freeze remains in effect, and the Department of Finance has required that approximately 131 vacancies be eliminated from the State and regional boards. Those positions are permanently lost. We also have a freeze on promotions.

State and regional board management developed a process so that cuts would be taken in a thoughtful manner, with consideration being first given to elimination of vacancies for this year, thus protecting our irreplaceable technical staff. I refer to staff as “irreplaceable” generally because of the hiring freeze, but more specifically because of the expertise, training, experience and water quality and work ethic that they bring to their jobs. Staff is obviously our most valuable asset.

Our priority-setting process involved looking at all of our programs. The debate about the relative priorities of these programs and where the cuts could be taken was lively. As always, some of our number felt that all of the programs were equally important, and that cuts could not be taken anywhere. This, of course, defeated the purpose of the exercise, given that cuts had to be taken. Eventually, agreement was hammered out (similar to the collective bargaining agreement in baseball), and as a result, immediate and longer-term reductions in programs and staffing were finally proposed. The programs most significantly affected by the cuts are Above Ground Tanks, Operator Certification, Department of Defense sites, Land Disposal, and Waste Discharge Requirements.

For the current year, given the budget reductions and the required level of program cuts, our level of authorized positions in the Santa Ana Region will drop from 92.2 to 80.6. All of our current vacancies have been eliminated. Further, the current reductions for this fiscal year also require that the next 1.4 personnel years (PYs) of staff lost to attrition will not be replaced. With the exception of the Colorado River Region, which is actually 1.9 PYs under-staffed for their 45.4 authorized positions, the other regional boards must use attrition to reduce staffing by 2.1 to 13.4 PYs.

The next step will be to identify the work products that should be eliminated to implement the reductions, and I am one of the three Executive Officers working on that effort. More to come.

Gerard Thibeault  
Executive Officer